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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/15/2018
TAGS: [AEMR](#) [ASEC](#) [AMGT](#) [PTER](#) [BL](#)
SUBJECT: EMERGENCY ACTION COMMITTEE MEETING-LA PAZ 1600
9/15/2008

Classified By: RSO: Patrick J. Moore for reasons 1.4 c,d

11. (C) Summary: The Emergency Action Committee (EAC) met at 1600 9/15 to discuss the protest of 9/15 that required evacuation of the alternate command center, the planned protest for 9/16 that may include violent student demonstrators, the ongoing authorized departure process, and the overall political situation. The Embassy was at minimal staffing until 1400 9/15 due to a protest. The alternate command center was set up at the USAID/NAS building on 9/15, but was evacuated at 1040 because a large crowd of protesters was headed toward the USAID/NAS building. As of 1400 9/15 staff were informed that they could return to work in the chancery or USAID/NAS building or take liberal leave. EAC decided to activate the cascade system and alert all employees that we will be at minimal staffing 9/16 due to the threat of a protest that could react badly to the counter-narcotics certification announcement. Charge requests that he be able to give advance notice of the counter-narcotics certification decision to the Bolivian government, to explain the decision and attempt to dampen the likelihood of an extreme reaction to the news from the Bolivian government. End summary.

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Protests: 9/15 and 9/16
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12. (C) EAC discussed possible reasons why the march, which during the morning of 9/15 included thousands of people, resulted in so much less conflict and damage than expected. Charge's meeting with Foreign Minister Choquehuanca on 9/14, in which Charge reminded the Bolivian government of their Vienna Convention responsibilities and requested that Government Minister Rada provide the police with full backing to confront the protests, may have had an impact. Government Minister Rada did publicly request that the social groups not protest because the Ambassador had already left the country. The government may also have wished to avoid international media coverage of a violent protest during the emergency UNASUR meeting in Santiago which President Morales is attending to solicit international support.

13. (C) Our sources suggest that the university students' demonstration planned for 9/16 may still take place and may include more radical and violent elements. A large group of government-aligned protesters is also reported to be planning to besiege the congress and block opposition politicians from entering (as happened previously on February 28) to force through legislation setting a date for the constitutional

referendum. In light of the fact that the counter-narcotics certification announcement is expected sometime tomorrow and the fact that government-aligned groups (including trade unions, Red Poncho indigenous militia, neighborhood associations and miners) could easily be re-directed to protest at the Embassy, EAC decided to operate on minimal staffing again on 9/16. The telephone cascade was initiated after the EAC meeting to advise embassy staff.

14. (C) EAC discussed lessons learned from the 9/15 minimal staffing and evacuation of the alternate command center. EAC agreed that USAID/NAS building will continue to be primary alternate command center, with Ambassador's residence as secondary alternate command center. IPC will install more computers at the Ambassador's residence as resources permit and is exploring having secure communications capability there also as needed.

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Authorized Departure Proceeding Smoothly
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15. (SBU) Management reported that 63 people (excluding DEA) have signed up for authorized departure. DEA reported that another 51 DEA personnel and EFMs have also signed up for authorized departure, for a total of 114 employees and EFMs. Management is processing cables and travel orders and management, consular, and community liaison officers (CLO) will be at the Ambassador's residence 9/16 starting at 8a.m. to continue processing authorized departures. The one NAS family that had previously been stuck in Santa Cruz has now arrived safely in La Paz.

16. (SBU) Consular and RSO reported that non-Mission Amcits are arranging to leave by chartered flights, commercial air, and overland. Currently there are still commercial flights available and all information is being provided to non-Mission Amcits under the no double standard policy. NAS reported that all three C130s are currently operational should they be needed for transport out of Bolivia. All Peace Corps volunteers have been successfully evacuated. EAC discussed the fact that the current lack of road blockades leaves open the option of overland evacuation, if needed.

17. (S/NF) EAC reviewed whether there was a need to move to ordered departure and decided that conditions did not warrant it at this time. Charge is requesting that he be able to give advance notice of the counter-narcotics certification decision to the Bolivian government, to possibly forestall violence on the part of the government-aligned social groups. MILGROUP reported that a SOUTHCOM SSAT team is preparing to travel to La Paz. RSO reports that an MSD team is in the process of being sent and may be at Post as early as 9/21.

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Political Situation
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18. (C) Students, miners, Ponchos Rojos indigenous militia, and other government-aligned groups are planning to besiege congress and prevent opposition congressmembers and senators from entering. If only government-aligned representatives are present, congress would be able to vote in favor of the pending legislation which will set a January 25, 2009 date for the referendum on the ruling Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) draft constitution.

19. (C) Contacts in Santa Cruz state that Tarija Prefect Mario Cossio has not yet returned from his "pre-negotiation" meetings in La Paz. The other opposition leaders are waiting until they can speak with Cossio before discussing the possibilities for dialogue. Currently they inform us that the government is requiring the return of all government buildings taken by opposition-aligned groups before negotiations can commence; opposition contacts inform us that this pre-condition will be difficult to meet. Opposition contacts inform us that MAS-aligned militants have entered the city of Santa Cruz but are so far quiet.

¶10. (C) Senate opposition leader Oscar Ortiz is currently in Santiago with the hopes of addressing the emergency UNASUR meeting. Brazilian President Lula announced 9/15 that UNASUR should listen to the opposition as well as the government; Lula has invited opposition Santa Cruz Prefect Costas to Brazil to discuss the domestic situation.

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Actions Considered
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¶11. (SBU) The EAC reviewed actions to take and notifications needed for Mission personnel and U.S. wardens. The following is provided:

- a. The cascade system will again be used to inform mission personnel of decision to go to minimal staffing on 9/16. Alternate command center (USAID/NAS) will only be used if needed.
- b. Charge asked that all email updates via the blackberry list-serve be sourced, so that if incorrect information is reported by the media, it will be clear that this information is from the media and the information can be corrected.
- c. EAC emphasized coordination and communication; announcements regarding the situation at the chancery will be made over the intercom system and decisions taken away from the chancery will be relayed to EAC members as quickly as possible.
- h. POCs are RSO Patrick Moore (moorepj@state.gov) and DRSO Daniel Hernandez (hernandezd@state.gov), IVG 547-8300.
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